

# ABOUT VISUAL ARTISTS

## Alan McNiell, "Open Spaces"

March 5-April 18 at the Hockaday Museum of Art in Kalispell, with a reception 5-7 p.m. April 9

Artist's website: [alanmcniel.com](http://alanmcniel.com)

Alan McNiell, who earned a master's degree at The University of Montana, lives in the Yaak Valley. From this remote corner of Montana, he has worked as an independent studio artist for over 25 years, exhibiting in museums, galleries, and at art festivals throughout the West.

According to the artist, "Open Spaces" is a series of paintings that documents a unique time in history, "a world with connections to the old west, and also the 21st century." The images reflect "the wide open spaces that surround us here in the Rocky Mountain west, and also the idea of open space within a painting – where there's plenty of room for the thoughts and imaginations of others."

In his work, the artist roams freely through a wide array of subject matter. He creates whimsical images of gulls, chickens, crows and dogs; melds fresh, spontaneous brushstrokes with texturing from sharpened metal tools in a series of western landscapes; and combines painting and photography is a series he describes as "urban landscapes."

McNiell recently received a first place in painting at the 2014 Scottsdale Arts Festival; his work has also appeared in exhibitions at the C.M. Russell Museum of Art in Great Falls, WaterWorks Art Museum in Miles City, Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings, and the Northwest Museum of Art and Culture in Spokane, and was selected for the Missoula Art Museum's 2012 Montana Triennial.

His paintings are in numerous public and private art collections, including those of the University of Washington Medical Center, North Idaho College, and Washington State's Percent-for-Art.

## Sue Tirrell, Solo Exhibition

March 6-April 24 at the Red Lodge Clay Center in Red Lodge

Artist's website: [suetirrellceramics.com](http://suetirrellceramics.com)

Red Lodge native Sue Tirrell shares a collection of her latest ceramic wares, adorned with colorful folk-inspired illustrations.

"All my life I have loved making things with my hands," she writes. "Tree forts, doll clothes, sculptures of animals, pies, pottery, knitted socks, jam. I love the practice of choosing and assembling materials; getting physical with the process; following the piece from idea to tactile, useful, beautiful, delicious object."

"When I stand back and survey my efforts, I know the best part is yet to come ... sharing these gifts from my hands makes my efforts joyful, the work a pleasure."

Tirrell received a BFA from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University in 1997. She has been a resident artist at the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena and California State University, Chico. She served as resident artist and education director at what is now the Waterworks Museum of Art in Miles City from 1998-2005, visiting 35 rural schools in a 200-mile radius with clay and multi-media art classes, including a portable raku kiln.

Tirrell's work has been included in juried and invitational exhibitions and she is represented by galleries in Denver, Livingston, Bozeman, Billings, Bigfork, Helena and Red Lodge. Her ceramic works are also part of permanent collections at several Montana museums, including the Yellowstone Art Museum, Archie Bray, WaterWorks Museum and the Montana Museum of Art and Culture; as well as the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art in Overland Park, KS.

Her platters and vessels are often adorned with fantastical creatures that seem to have romped out of a tale by the Brothers Grimm. "I draw inspiration for my decoration from many sources including early American pottery, folk art, children's books and fairytales," she says.

Tirrell lives, works, gardens and plays with her husband and two enthusiastic dogs in Pray.

## "The Warrior Art of John Isaiah Pepion"

Through April 13 at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art in Great Falls

Artist's website: [www.pepionledgerart.com](http://www.pepionledgerart.com)

John Isaiah Pepion, an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Nation, shares 18 drawings on antique ledger paper that explore the warrior in Blackfeet culture.

"I am interested in the story of the Blackfeet warrior and ceremonial aspects of Blackfeet culture and how they may be represented through my artwork," he says.

The artist uses oil-based color pencils and ink to manifest ideas inspired by oral tradition, family history, traditional designs, personal experience, and dreams.



"Oreos" by Alan McNiell

Pepion was born in Kalispell and produced pencil drawings of mountains and tipis as a child. His grandfather, Daniel "Webb" Pepion Sr., helped mentor his drawing techniques and inspire his art. He's also received instruction and inspiration from Blackfeet artists Ernie Pepion and Terrance Guardipee.

He eventually earned an Associate of Arts degree from the United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, ND, and graduated from the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe with a degree in museum studies.

Now considered an up-and-coming contemporary ledger artist, Pepion illustrates ideas stemming from his personal life and cultural history, and incorporates the colorful designs of the Blackfeet into his work.



"The Guardian" by John Isaiah Pepion

## Bill Ryder, "A Natural Connection"

Through March 30 at 1+1=1 Gallery in Helena, alongside works by John Andrew and Alaina Buffalo Spirit

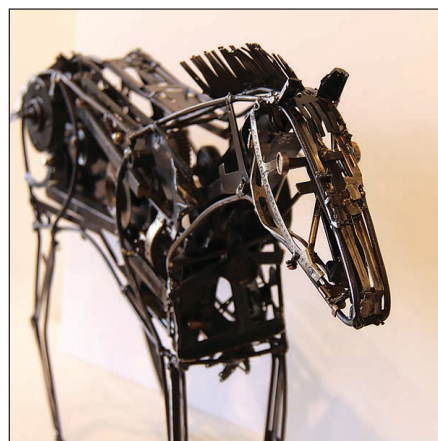
Artist's website: [www.ryderhorses.com](http://www.ryderhorses.com)

Helena sculptor Bill Ryder has been making his unique, life-size metal horses for years. Recently, he began to use telegraph wire and parts from manual typewriters and sewing machines to create the smaller "steampunk" horse sculptures on display in this show.

His sculptures have been shown at galleries in Helena, Belgrade and Augusta, and were featured last May in a one-man show at the Lewistown Art Center. His Musical Horse, created from old harmonicas, saxophones, a French horn, trumpet, Model-T car horn, xylophones, drums, trombones, and other musical instruments, was displayed at the Holter Museum of Art in Helena.

He's also donated his equines to several good causes in the community, including the Florence Crittenton Home, elementary schools (where he's helped kids create their own sculptures), Eagle Mount and the Tibetan Children's Education Foundation.

Ryder is a self-taught artist who began crafting horse sculptures about 12 years ago. Although he's never taken an art class, he's an experienced motorcycle mechanic and trained welder. His wife, Julie, helps him salvage ingredients from thrift stores, junkyards, and area ranches. Whether he creates works in polished stainless steel, rusty metal or driftwood, he seeks to reveal the powerful nature of the horse in simple, curving lines.



Steampunk Horse by Bill Ryder

## Marty Essen, "Inspiring Photos from Ferguson"

March 2-21 at the Carle Gallery in the Butte-Silver Bow Library, with a reception 2-5 p.m. March 21

Artist's website: [www.martyessen.com](http://www.martyessen.com)

On a recent college-speaking tour, Victor author and artist Marty Essen visited Ferguson, MO, where he captured images of boarded-up storefronts that the people of that community had used as canvases to deliver a powerful message to the world.

Ferguson was deeply divided after an unarmed 18-year-old black man was shot by a police officer there last summer. Essen took the photographs on Dec. 3, just nine days after a Grand Jury had decided not to indict the policeman.

"I remember driving toward my St. Louis-based hotel, debating: should I detour through Ferguson?" writes Essen. "Like many Americans I had seen the protests and burning buildings on television on the night of the verdict. Would it be wise for a white man to wander the city's streets so soon?"

He drove into town and was startled by what greeted him. "Instead of seeing burned-out buildings or violence, I saw a town where the people had made the best of a bad situation by turning boarded-up storefronts into amazing works of art."

Essen is no stranger to danger. While traveling the world, in search of rare and interesting wildlife, he was stung by one of the world's most venomous insects, bitten by a poisonous snake, surrounded by wolves and attacked by a hippo. He chronicled his unique adventures in his book, *Cool Creatures, Hot Planet: Exploring the Seven Continents*, and has since turned the story into a multi-media show, "Around the World in 90 Minutes," which he presents at colleges, museums, and nature centers across the United States.

Sharing images of Ferguson seemed like a way "to start the healing process" and begin a conversation "about what we can do to prevent similar tragedies from happening in the future."



"Together" by Marty Essen



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## Send your submissions for About Visual Arts

With About Visual Arts, *State of the Arts* continues to profile living Montana artists (no students, please), whose work is the focus of a current exhibit (on display during some portion of the two months covered by the current issue of *State of the Arts*).

Submissions must include:

- A digital image of the artist's work, with title of the piece (at least 200 dpi);
- A brief bio and description of the artist's work;
- Dates and title of exhibit; and
- The gallery or museum name, town and phone number.

MAC will select submissions that reflect a cross-section of gender, geography, styles and ethnicity, and are from a mix of public and private galleries and museums.

Deadline for submissions for the May/June issue is Wednesday, April 1. Send submissions to [write-us@livelytimes.com](mailto:write-us@livelytimes.com) with About Visual Arts in the subject line.

About Visual Artists  
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